Northeast District / Metropolitan Community Churches
An FFO/CE/GSS Conference:
Envisioning Tomorrow's Church: A Colloquy on Church Order
Saturday, November 13, 1976, Brooklyn Heights, New York

9:00 am Registration, coffee
9:30 am Some New Testament Principles for Church Order F. Jay Deacon
Responses, Discussion
12 noon Lunch
12:30 pm Small Groups: Defining the function of church organization: What do we need it for? National/International organization, District organization, and local church boards
1:15 pm Reports from groups and discussion
2:00 pm Break
2:15 pm Reflections and Interpretation: Rev Charles Straut, Executive Director, Brooklyn Division, The Council of Churches of the City of New York
3:00 pm Small groups: Defining our realities--problems for MCCers
3:30 pm Reports from groups and discussion
Envisioning tomorrow's church: form following function and biblical principles in specific proposals for the Commission on Government, Structures and System

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Some Questions for MCCers

1. What are some major themes emerging from the current church renewal movement?
2. How are concepts about professional ministry changing?
3. How are concepts about the ministry of the "laity" changing?
4. How do changing notions of ministry affect church order?
5. Jackson Carrall has said, "Local congregations ... need to be relatively free to organize themselves in ways appropriate to a faithful performance of their ministry and mission ...." How can we promote local church autonomy without sacrificing accountability?
   (a) The enclosed diagram shows one model that actually violates present denominational polity. How should denominational polity relate to or specify local organization?
   (b) Newer or smaller congregations, called "missions" and "study groups," enjoy little self-government. How does MCC perpetuate the false ideal of bigness in the Church? How do we discriminate against members of our small congregations? Is nondemocratic, nonparticipatory procedure ever appropriate? When?
6. What about church boards? What are the pros and cons of our present structure and of alternative structures that have been presented?
7. What about the use of loaded ecclesiastical language? Should we avoid risking the confusion generated by words like "deacon," "Elder," "bishop," and others? What about the use of language from the business world? What, in fact, is the importance of our use of language when designing church structures?
8. On the denominational or district level, is it important that officials have roots in local congregations? As pastors? Or is it a worthy goal that these servants be fulltime? What of combining the offices of district coordinator and elder?
9. What about ministry interns ("exhorters")? Should these relate primarily to a local church for supervision, or to the denomination or district?
10. Is our current notion of ordination congruent with today's understandi g of the church? Is there a move toward more or less, or different, formal training for professional leadership?
11. How may we best relate national churches with the international UFMCC?
12. When it comes to church order, how important is nostalgia to MCCers?

SOME BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESOURCES

NEW AND MOST IMPORTANT: A study by two Duke Divinity School professors of restructuring and reorganization processes in various denominations. Title to be announced very soon. Publisher: Abingdon. Author: Bob Wilson. FORTHCOMING.

Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia M. Hine. PEOPLE, POWER, CHANGE. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970).

Paul M. Harrison. AUTHORITY AND POWER IN THE FREE CHURCH TRADITION. (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1959).

John Fry. THE TRIVIALIZATION OF THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975).

Ezra Earl Jones. STRATEGIES FOR NEW CHURCHES. (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

Amitai Etzioni. MODERN ORGANIZATIONS. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964).

Gordon Cosby, HANDBOOK FOR MISSION GROUPS. (Waco, Texas: Word, 1975).

From Project Test Pattern, these books in parish development:

Celia A. Hahn. PATTERNS FOR PARISH DEVELOPMENT. (New York: Seabury/Crossroad, 1974). Especially useful for local congregation self-study efforts.

James D. Anderson, TO COME ALIVE: A New Proposal for Revitalizing the Local Church. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

Also useful are denominational policy manuals such as UPUSA's or UMC's BOOK OF ORDER.

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TOWARD MORE MISSION-BASED, PARTICIPATORY CHURCH BOARDS

Since our task requires a vigorous pursuit of the determination that form follow function, we must first ask the question of function. What is a church board for?

I believe we can answer the question in a word: administration. But administration of what? How we understand the church will determine this second answer.

The Christian Church must be understood in terms of a shared ministry--the enablement of the shared "priesthood of all believers," and the coordination of this shared mission of prophetic interpretation, education, advocacy, servanthood and fellowship.

Official church boards have frequently been constituted in a way that easily becomes a sort of power elite, on the model of the business world. UFMCC even uses the language of business, the "board of directors." These "directors" may be only distantly related to the real ministries of the church. To their credit, many MCC congregations have elected boards that are intimately involved with the essense of the church--its ministries. But why not adopt a structure that assumes that kind of involvement--one that assumes an authority and administrative base that is located more squarely where the church's ministries are? Why not intentionally place those actually responsible for the essential elements of the church's ministry right where they can make the decisions, in consultation with one another? Why not intentionally cultivate a leadership/ministry team?

A more participatory board might be larger, depending entirely on the local situation. The United Methodist Church uses a structure similar to the Hartford alternative model, but Methodists could afford to become somewhat more contextualist in their approach. It ought to be more flexible in favor of small congregations, since it mandates a minimum of five commissions, whose chairpersons are, of course, board members. The First United Methodist Church of Germantown (Philadelphia) had a 76-member board last time I checked, expressive of its size and scope of ministry and diversity of membership. But the size of the baord ought to be adaptable to very small churches, as well as to very large ones. I think it is a mistake for the UMC to mandate a minimum number of local commissions which must be represented. However, the key to the efficient workability of a board is not its size--and "small" does not equal "efficient"--but the sophisticated fine-tuning of its administration, and the ability of the board's members to relate and work together.

After careful self-study and reflection on the organic, systemic nature of the local congregation and its work, many progressive churches and denominations are moving toward this sort of model. At the Church of the Savior in Washington, DC, when a new ministry is inaugurated, its leader is voted a seat on the Board by the congregation and a new commission ("mission group") is constituted. The same holds true in an increasing number of churches. Thus, those who make the crucial decisions are those who are most in touch with the ministries.

In this way, also, the whole congregation feels a greater access to the process. The congregation elects its leaders, and elects a lay moderator. While more than symbolic, the symbolism is powerful: the church belongs to the congregation. They are the church. The pastor may moderate if s/he senses a critical need to do so, but will not do so normally. The gifts of all, including administrative gifts, may be fully recognized and utilized.

Our congregation believes it important that UFMCC government, structures and systems officially make room for this model cor the sake of more participatory, open, mission-centered local organization for ministry.

NEW TESTAMENT PRINCIPLES FOR CHURCH ORDER

A Preliminary Study Document

By F. JAY DEACON
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UEMCC Commission on Government, Structures and Systems

** JUST AS THE CHURCH is called to hear the Word of God afresh in every age--not simply preaching a composite of all that has gone before, but listening to the Spirit for itself--so the Church must seek to structure its life and organize its ministry in a manner congruent with the Gospel it preaching--not simply taking the shape of a composite picture of the institutionalized Church as it has always been known.

What has the New Testament to say about the order and ministry of this phenomenon called Church?

Or, more precisely, called Ekklesia. It is a wholly secular word. Consistent with the usual word choice in the New Testament on the subject of Church, it is not a cultic, or sacred, term. It derives from the root "to call," but in fact means an assembly of people. In the singular, says K.L. Schmidt, "the decisive point is not that someone or something assembles; it is who or what assembles."[1] The explicit or implicit modifier "of God" or "of Christ" specifies who or what. God assembles his/her own (Acts 20:28); and to this assembly belong all God's own. How many there are depends on the One who calls and on those who respond. It may be a matter of two or three (Mt 18:20).

Paul uses ekklesia as importantly as does Acts. Even so small a fellowship as a house church can be called ekklesia (1 Cor 14:4). There is no invisible, mystic ekklesia of which local congregations are a part. Though its true membership is known only to God, and though it is never an institution, the Church is a visible fellowship of persons. It is a fellowship in the profoundest sense. Koinonia, the New Testament's (and especially Paul's) word for fellowship, is an abstract from the verb, "to share with someone in something he has" or "to take part." It implies a participatory community.[2] Its members may be most aware of their membership when it is not assembled, but when each Christian is offering his/her life in servanthood.

The study of "ecclesiology" has moved to a consensus: the defining mark of the Church lies beyond Word and Sacraments: in mission, the servanthood to God's mission in the world. The Church is not an end in itself. It exists, as its Lord, for others.[3] In the Church's life-for-the-world, the world may discern its own destiny. The Church's task is to find the points in the world where Christ is carrying out his/her struggle, and to make that struggle visible as a sign of God's purpose for the world, a sign of Christ's humanizing work.

No longer may the Church seek to rule the world in the medieval, lordly sense. Now the Church can only be what its Lord intends: a servant of God's purpose in history, toward the goal of the new world of God's kingdom, the rule of love, justice, peace and freedom. The Church is a movement: a pilgrim people engaged in an exodus. Where it often desire given continuities, it must expect, instead, change:

> What then are those "given continuities" that are provided for the church for its pilgrimage? The problem is that they have no fixed form. The church realized after the death and resurrection of Jesus that it could no longer center its life on a fixed temple of stones (or a fixed body of law, or a fixed body of doctrine, or a fixed cultus), because it is the living temple of Christ's moving presence.[4]

As Christ did not come as one dispensing prepackaged answers, the bringer of a changeless eternal order, but rather as a full participant in history as a servant, so must the Church. It can be no less then blasphemy that the Chruch should serve as the bulwark for a dying social order. The Church must be free to move out with Christ into deep struggle, into God's future.

Colin Williams poses a question so urgent no MCCer dare fail to consider it:

> We face now a time of institutional crisis. The ferment has reached the point where the level of recognition of the need for re-formation (renewal) is not becoming focused in on a question: Can the renewal that God is bringing to his (sic) church come about through a planned restructuring of the churches toward the missionary obedience that is now required, or is the inertia and resistence of present structures such that renewal can only come from outside?[5]

A church remotely aware of its identity, nature and purpose cannot be surprised at the appearance of new forms of Church, or, at this turn of history, the appearance of the Metropolitan Community Churches.

Here, then, is my central thesis:

We who call ourselves Metropolitan Community Church are now presented with an occasion for momentous discovery. Our particular experience of life at this specific moment of history, interpreted with the help of biblical scholarship as it rediscovers the prophetic word of the Gospel, add up to the call of God to be the Church, to participate in the Spirit's freeing, saving ministry at this turning-point in history -- to be among those whom the Spirit sets about the tasks which he/she has to fulfill in our time.

Faithfulness to the call to be the Church requires faithfulness to the task of biblical interpretation. The New Testament offers no outline for institutional structure. It does offer, urgently, some principles for ordering the Church's life.

A remarkable discovery awaits anyone who would ask the New Testament its view of church order: it has no technical definition of what we are accustomed to call ecclesiastical office, even though it speaks freely by name of such office and functions within secular power structure and that of the Old Testament priesthood.

As will begin to appear below, the thematic term of the New Testament's choice is diakonia. It seems determined in its purposive avoidance of the technical conception of office current in religion and society.[6] Its concerns are, rather, the building of community and its enrichment and enablement to minister through the gifts of the Spirit.

A STORYTELLING GLOSSARY

A consideration of biblical church order requires an understanding of certain familiar words. As I introduce them, they tell a story--in four stages: (1) Jewish and secular ideas, (2) Jesus' style of leadership reflected in the Synoptics, (3) Charismatic ideas from Paul and John, and (4) Catholic/hierarchical ideas.

1. JEWISH AND SECULAR IDEAS

HIERARCHY (archē=ἀρχή). Primacy or rank. So the Septuagint speaks of high priests and Egyptian court officials. The New Testament uses it for Jewish and Gentile authorities. (Timē=τιμή). Honor and dignity in office. In the New Testament, used only of the high priest. (Telos=τέλος). Describes total power of office. Never used in this sense in the New Testament.

PRIEST. A term that comes to us through the Latin presbyter from the Greek presbuteros, or elder (see below). But modern usage is not at all related to this meaning; which is derived instead from the Greek hiereus, and Latin sacerdos--someone whose principal function is offering sacrifice. The word "priest" is not used once anywhere in the New Testament for an officeholder in the Church. It is a title given to Old Testament Judaic dignitaries and to Gentile dignitaries. Jesus does not associate himself with the image of the priest, but rather is critical of the priestly caste. Under the new understanding of the New Testament, all are priests. Priests from the Jewish cult join themselves to the Church--and find no special status there.

PRESBYTER/ELDER. The term presbuteros=πρεσβύτερος is used only negatively. In Mk 7:1-23 and Mt 15:1-20, the tradition taught by the Jewish elders is human and not divine in origin according to Jesus, who accepts neither the Torah nor the tradition as formal authorities, setting them all (Mk 7:6-13) in antithesis to "the command of God" (Mk 10:1-12 and 7:15).

JESUS' STYLE OF LEADERSHIP

SERVANTHOOD (diakonia=διακονία). Deaconate is a word in danger of mistranslation to mean an honor or new kind of rule. Yet every Greek would at once recognize in it only self abasement: waiting on tables, serving food and pouring wine--while the noble masters would lie at the table in their long robes. The first use of the word in the New Testament is consistent with this original sense (Lk 17:8). So the disciples are shocked by Jesus' servantlike action in John 13. The decisive passage is Lk 22:24f and parallels: "A dispute arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leaders as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves." Principally this means that Jesus is the person for others (Mk 9:35, 10:43-45; Mt 20:26-28, Lk 8:3, Mk 15:41, Mt 24:45, Mk 9:33-35). In a broader sense, diakoneo (the verb) means "to be serviceable" (Mt 25:42-44, 20:26-28; Mk 10:43-45).

APOSTLE. Always a person sent, with full authority. (It had this legal sense, and so necessarily excluded women, who had no legal competence!) It is a comprehensive term for bearers of the New Testament message, beginning with The Twelve.

CHARISMATIC IDEAS (IN THE PAULINE, JOHANNINE WRITINGS)

CHARISMA (χαρίσμα). A critically important term usually translated "gift," "spiritual gift," "free gift," "blessing," or in the special sense of Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, the "spiritual gifts." The idea of charisma in Pauline and sub-Pauline thought expresses in exact terms the essence and scope of church ministry and function. Paul uses the term technically as a critical response to other early Christian views about offices of ministry. An understanding of it must begin with Rom 6:33--"The charisma of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Other charismata exist only because of this one. Käsemann7 argues that this implies the gifts can be possessed only insofar as we are possessed by the Giver and Lord. We can only have charis (a related word usually translated grace but in Paul normally meaning power) to the extent Christ's Lordship is acting through us, making us serviceable in the sense of diakonia.

Charisma is used in relation to pneumatika, a technical term of Hellenism, where pneumatics included all the powers of miracle and ecstasy. Paul accepts the possibility of miracle and ecstasy: they may even be characteristic marks of the Christian community, since the Spirit is discovered in the most intimate depths of life where the presence of the divine is most surely encountered. The Spirit is the creative power of the coming and present Kingdom, experienced in the Christian community. But if Paul

relates power and miracle to the Spirit, he makes a distinction between pneumatics and charismata. Antichrist, after all, can produce marvels too (2 Thess 2:9, Mk 13:22). Paul uses "pneumatic" when speaking of the enthusiasts, the fanatic-fringe at Corinth. Paul must recall them to earth from their fantasy-heaven.

The charismatics possess the gifts of the pneumatics, but they are more. In the Christian community Paul substitutes charisma for pneumatic. The pneumatic enthusiasts were self-serving, fantasy-tripping. The charismatic was one who could say "Jesus is Lord;" that is, a charismatic and joyfully embraces the truth that a greater, unifying purpose of love binds all being together and transcends every selfish interest, placing upon us demands of loving service. One might even say that it is the experience of the saving grace of God as acceptance that is the prerequisite for the centered, integrated, whole person who is capable of transcending a selfcentered life and serving the Lordship of Christ.

The mark of a true spiritual gift is that it edifies the community and helps people. According to 1 Cor 12ff the potentialities of the pneumatics are transformed into true gifts by the fact thtat they are given. "No spiritual endowment has value, rights or privileges on its own account," insists Kasemann. "It is validated only by the service it renders.... Heaven comes to earth when grace creates obedience and the acceptance of responsibility...." 8

And so, the spirits must be tested (2 Cor 11:13). No gift, not even that of an apostle, stands above the judgment of the community. The question: is it charismatic, or merely pneumatic? The catalog of gifts is endless. Paul cites those belonging to the ministry of the kerygma, the community service gifts of healing, caring for the poor, etc; the administrative and pastoral gifts and technical forms of gifted service. "All things ... are God's gift. All things stand within the charismatic possibility...." 9 1 Cor 7:7 announces that "everyone has his/her charisma from God."

PROPHET. After Pentecost prophecy is the inspired speech of charismatic preachers through which God's saving purpose is made known. The prophets know something of the divine mysteries (1 Cor 13:2) and some aspects of the future (Acts 11:28, 21:10f). But more significantly, the prophet speaks out on contemporary issues. Whereas Old Testament prophets were few, New Testament prophets are numerous and include women (the word itself occurs 144 times, the most-used of the words under discussion).10

APOSTLE. In retrospect, apostles will later become the source of authority for the institutional church, and attempts will be made after their departure to validate ministries by seeking to show some direct ties with the central Twelve apostles. But in Paul the word applies to a wide group of missionaries, including Paul, who has difficulty gaining the recognition of the Twelve, whom he does not wholly respect at every point (Gal 1:1-2:14; 2 Corinthians). Rom 17:7 names two of the most obscure of the wider group.11

PASTOR (Poimēn=ποιμήν). From the agricultural backdrop of the Bible, the shepherd. Ancient civilizations had come to call kings and gods shepherds. Only once--in Eph 4:11--are congregational leaders called shepherds, and the grammar shows that pastors and teachers formed a single category.

TEACHER. This old technical term names a class whose ministry is tied to that of the pastor.

ADMINISTRATOR (kubérnēsis=κυβέρνησις). This charism's name comes from "helmsman," from the verb, "to steer a ship." In 1 Cor 12:28 it refers to the administrative "skipper" of a church. Says Brunner, "In the New Testament Ekklesia ... the persons appointed to have control of the churches were marked out by the charisma of kybernesis, not by that of preaching or teaching. Persons of quite another order had the chief responsi-

bility for the service of the Word: the apostles in the first instance, then the prophets, the teachers and the evangelists...." 12

SERVANTHOOD (diakonia). As in the Gospels, diakonos still means servant. Paul uses the title for himself, as in 1 Cor 3:5, Eph 3:7, and Col 1:23. He makes no reference to elders/presbyters. Not that there is no order here. Leaders were simply called diakonos, differentiated according to function in the church.

CATHOLIC / HIERARCHICAL IDEAS
(Luke-Acts and Pastoral Epistles)

ELDER/PRESBYTER. The dramatic contrast between the notions of church order presented heretofore, and those described here, is nowhere more clearly signalled than in the changing use of this weighted word. In its base meaning it denotes age or maturity. It was used of political office, especially in Egypt and Sparta. The Egyptian political officials were not generally, in fact, old men. In the Septuagint it translates the Hebrew word for the Old Testament "elders" of the community--having once denoted clan and family heads, and coming to mean representatives of larger units until, in biblical times, they represented the whole people. Members of the Sanhedrin, too, were called elders, as were scribes. According to Acts there were elders in the first church in Jerusalem. This fact probably represents a less-than-serious taking over of the Jewish term as used in local synagogue structure in the contemporary Hellenistic Judaism, since the Jerusalem Christians were already familiar with the term. Elders do not appear in Acts until 11:30. In 12:17 James is first called the leader of the Jerusalem church. G. Bornkamm's study yields this conclusion: "The formation of a body of elders, first after the synagogal model, then ... with the same claim as the sanhedrin, belongs only to the period of the increasing Judaising of the primitive community under James after the departure of Peter." 13

The term is used also in the Pastorals. So far, "presbyter" and "elder" are simply two translations for the same office. These form a college, while episkopos, bishop, is always singular. The bishop appears in 1 Timothy and Titus. By now the elders are no longer natural representatives of the community but a college of appointed leaders. The bishop now represents a monarchical trend, an administrative post. The development of a Presbyterial constitution under the influence of the synagogue of the Diaspora comes up in the post-apostolic writings.

DEACON (diakonia, diakonos). "Servant" has by now been transformed into an office, "deacon." At first deacons are coordinated with the office of bishop, as his servants--paralleling the Jewish synagogue. Their function was strictly cultic. The term had pagan cultic connections, but only indirectly, only as a cook for a cultic party. We are not told what the deacons in the catholocizing church did; only their qualifications. Deacons appear in Acts 15, but it must be recalled that Luke's sources for historical data were Judaizing Christian ones, and that his picture comes from a later era when there were no apostles--except as an ideal from the past.

It has often been supposed that Acts 6 depicts the origin of the diaconate. This is probably not so; and the noun is not used there. Acts 6 represents the rise of a Hellenistic office to counter Jewish control of the Church--a Hellenistic Seven to parallel the Jewish Twelve.

APOSTLE. By the time of the composition of Acts, the Twelve, with Peter pre-eminent (2:37, 5:29) are pictured almost as a college with the elders. The Acts phrase, "apostles and elders," should be read as a later projection of the apostolic ideal upon the elders, who were thought in the Jerusalem Church to represent the apostolic presence (Acts 15:2,4,6,22f; 16:4). In Acts, Paul is consistently denied the title "apostle," with one exception.

CLERGY. From kleros=κλῆρος, Acts 1:17, 26. The beginning of a limited office of ministry is represented by this term, used here as the "lot" of the successor to Judas, and developed, by Origen's time (In Jer 11,3: PL 13,370) into office holders as distinct from "the people."

LAITY (lakios=λαϊκός). A person who was neither a priest nor a Levite in Jewish usage. The term was current in the Church from the third century onward. When church renewalists today, however, speak of laity, they have in mind laos=λαός, the equivalent of the Hebrew עם, meaning, together with the modifier "of God," the important biblical idea of the people of God. The people of God is identified with the Old Testament Israel, and in the New Testament (e.g. Rom 9:25f, 2 Cor 6:14ff, Tit 2:14, Heb 8:10, 1 Pet 2:9f) with the Church. This second idea does not imply a lay class distinct from a clergy class.

* * *

OUR SURVEY of the changing ideas about church order leaves us with a problem: How did the Church move from a charismatic-servanthood style of life to an institutional hierarchy? Is it development, or distortion?

Hans Kung argues that it is development, acknowledging only Catholic hierarchical structure--at least in earlier works, especially Structures of the Church. There he sees no possibility for coexistence with other forms of Church. His case focuses on what he viewed as the central dilemma facing Protestants: "Either to accept early Catholicism as an element of the New Testament and thereby definitely embark on the road to 'late Catholicism,' or else to reject early Catholicism as an element of the New Testament and correct the canon accordingly."[14] It is the strange argument, terrible in its consequences, that because it happened, it was the will of God. The establishment of the "canon" was, in fact, the frightened attempt of the rabbinical leaders who, after the destruction of Jerusalem, gathered in Jamnia about AD 90, to consolidate and conserve what remained of their movement. It assumes a view of revelation never intended by biblical writers, to whom revelation was alive, dynamic, and growing. Kung's reading of the New Testament is legalistic.

Some explanations for the change have been suggested. Historical evidence indicates that Paul's influence declined rapidly. He insisted on the priesthood of all believers, and that a special ministry is assigned to anyone who has recieved the Spirit. That view fell on difficult times with the rise of a threat to the Christian movement--the rise of gnostic fanaticism. Sterner order seemed necessary. The Church grasped for forms of government that had stood the test in Judaism and secular society, and had been tried in the Jewish Christianity in James' Jerusalem. There, the view was that the charismata are given with ecclesiastical office, dependent upon the laying on hands by the presbytery. Now, it seemed possible to exercise control over the operations of the Spirit, who could now be bound to office. Freedom was surrendered to authority that could not be questioned.[15]

Further, it has been suggested that the nonappearance of the parousia, the expected coming in glory of the returning, triumphant Christ to establish God's kingdom, forced Christians to a more stable, permanent order.

But nowhere so much as in the Johannine writings was such a "second coming" less expected. For Johannine Christians, the coming of the Kingdom was a spiritual experience presently available to the believer. In the same writings spirituality and mystic experience reach their height. And here, precisely in John, church order is the most anti-hierarchical. In John there isn't even any distinction of function. Something like a monarchical bishop appears in 3 John 9--as an opponent of God!

Another explanation for the change is Brunner's: Institutionalism is produced by sacramentalism. With the rise of sacramentalism, great concern is focussed on appointing authoritative guardians of the sacrament--bishops, presbyters, elders--so it may be correctly celebrated. The Body of Christ is now no longer seen in the communion, or fellowship, of the people, but is increasingly identified with the elements of the holy meal.[16] This, in contrast to the New Testament, where not a word is said as to who may or may not baptize or administer the bread and wine in the meal.

There is simply no such authoritarian structure in the New Testament: "It knows no distinction between the active and the passive, between those who administer and those who are recipients.... This cult ... knows nothing of the distinction between priests and laymen: its members are aware that they form a priesthood ..." [17]

It is clear that even within the New Testament period, at the same moment and in the same geographical area, there existed, side by side, radically different notions of church order.

Nowhere is the New Testament Church, in any of its forms, anarchic. It sought unity under the figures of such clashing leaders as Peter and Paul. The Peter figure, taken by the Roman Catholic Church as a symbol of institutional unity, was led to ultimate failure and distortion because the church took over too easily the world's power structure. Now the Roman church is embarked on a painful reassessment of its authoritarian order.[18] American Baptists recently came to terms with the fact that the relative absence of structure does not necessarily result in maximum freedom and creativity. A structure always arises, if by default. So they reorganized, in order to install structures that could make it possible for the Church to be more genuinely participatory.[19]

To what models ought MCC to turn? How shall we structure our fellowship? The design of the structures we need now is a task for those gifted with the charism of kubernesis (see p. 4f above) ! Whatever specific forms we shall choose, let them answer to these minimal requirements suggested by our study of the nature of the Church:

1. ACCOUNTABILITY. Every ministry stands under the judgment of the whole community. Our ministry is shared. It must never be destroyed by unfaithfulness, incompetence, ignorance, selfserving fanaticism, or even inefficiency.

2. FLEXIBILITY. No form is sacred on its own account. UFMCC churches must be free to discover the meaning of their ministry and the presence of the spiritual gifts in their peculiarity, and to experiment. Creativity must never be stifled by law. Perhaps overworked ecclesiastical language should be avoided altogether.

3. NEWNESS. As the creation of the Spirit, the Church may never expect the comfort of changeless forms. We have not been called for the purpose of maintaining an institution, nor the tradition of the Old Testament priesthood, nor any other specific form we may come to cherish. The Spirit has called us, as a pilgrim people, to be about his/her tasks in the world today in the freedom that is tha mark of the New Testament Church.

4. SERVICEABILITY. The Church is defined by faithful service. It cannot be identified with any institution--so our administrative structures must serve and promote our ministry.

5. COMMUNITY. The Church is, in its essense, a participation in the live and ministries of one another, the sharing of faith, insight, and caring. The Church must be participatory. Decisionmaking should be a process of informed consensus.

6. DISTINCTION OF GIFTS. There can be no do-it-all "clergy" who carry on as though possessing the full catalog of charismata! While the Church must set aside, and provide for, professional leadership and skilled servants, it must be about the business of discovering and nurturing the particular giftedness of all its members. It must be organized so that there will be neither a power-elite nor power-by-default, but rather the power of the Spirit exercised through every member.

NOTES

[1]K. L. Schmidt, ἐκκλησία, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament III. (Grand Rapids: Eermans.) 505.

[2]F. Hauck, κοινωνία, TDNT III, 797-809. UNDER καλέω

[3]Colin Williams, The Church. New Directions in Theology Today IV (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968).

[4]Williams, 29.

[5]Williams, 167f.

[6]Edward Schweizer, Church Order in the New Testament. Studies in Biblical Theology No 32. (London: SCM, 1961), 174ff; Rudolph Pesch, "New Testament Foundations of a Democratic Form of Life in the Church," in Democratization of the Church, ed Alois Müller (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 54; Hans Kung, The Church (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 388ff.

[7]Ernst Kasemann, "Ministry and Community in the New Testament." Essays on New Testament Themes. Studies in Biblical Theology No 41. (London: SCM, 1964).

[8]Kasemann, "Ministry and Community," 67.

[9]Kasemann, "Ministry and Community," 72.

[10]See Kraemer, Rendtorff, Meyer, Friedrich, προφήτης, TDNT VI, 781-861.

[11]See K.H. Rengstorf, ἀπόστολος, TDNT I, 407-447.

[12]Emil Brunner, The Misunderstanding of the Church (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 80.

[13]Hans Kung, Structures of the Church (New York: Nelson, 1964), 156.

[13]G. Bornkamm, πρεσβύτερος, TDNT VI, 663.

[15]Brunner, Misunderstanding, 80ff; Kasemann, "Paul and Early Catholicism," New Testament Questions of Today (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 248; E. Schweizer, Church Order, 85ff.

[16]Brunner, Misunderstanding, 72ff, esp 76f.

[17]Brunner, Misunderstanding, 61f; Schweizer, 31; and Kung, The Church, who argues, 363-387, that there can be no NT justification for such classifications as "lay" and "clergy," and that the only suitable name for those who hold office in the church is "diakonos."

[18]Representative of this reassessment is Democratization of the Church, ed A. Müller, cited above, n.6.

[19]The problems faced and solutions offered are discussed in Study Commission on Denominational Structure of the American Baptist Convention Churches: Final Report (Denver: American Baptist Convention, 1972).

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PRESENTED TO
THE COMMISSION ON GOVERNMENT, STRUCTURES, AND SYSTEMS.

Prepared by F. Jay Deacon

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_____ "The Canon of the New Testament and the Unity of the Church," op. cit. pp. 95-107. Studies in the diversity within the New Testament over against the order of the canon.

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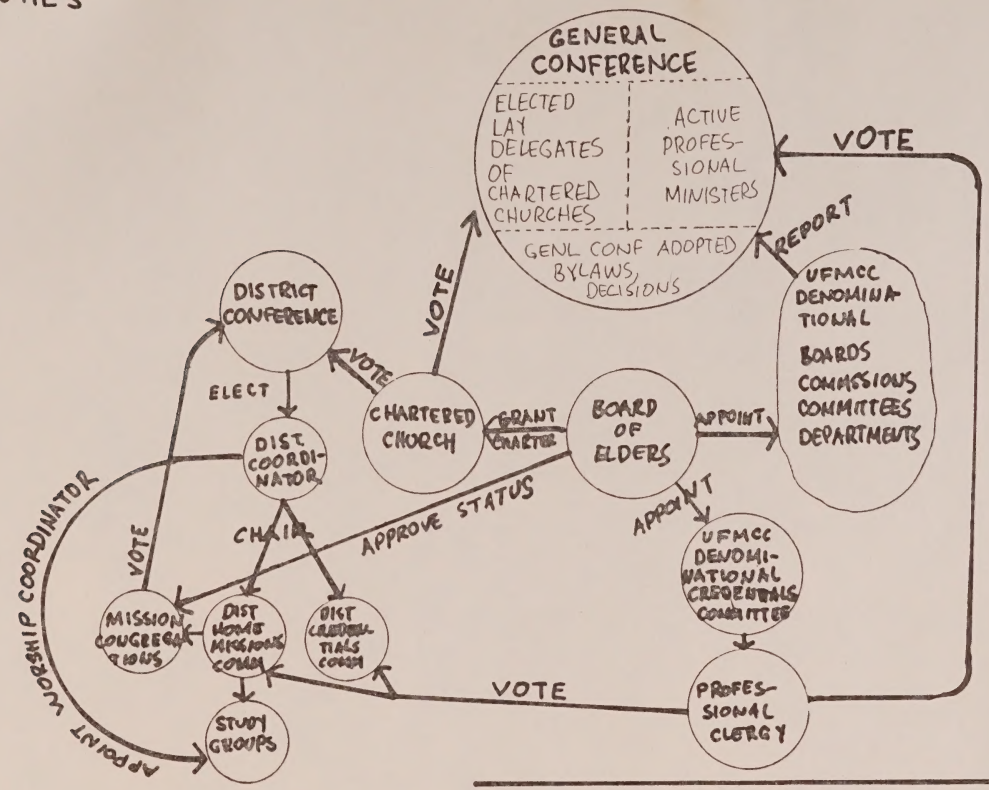
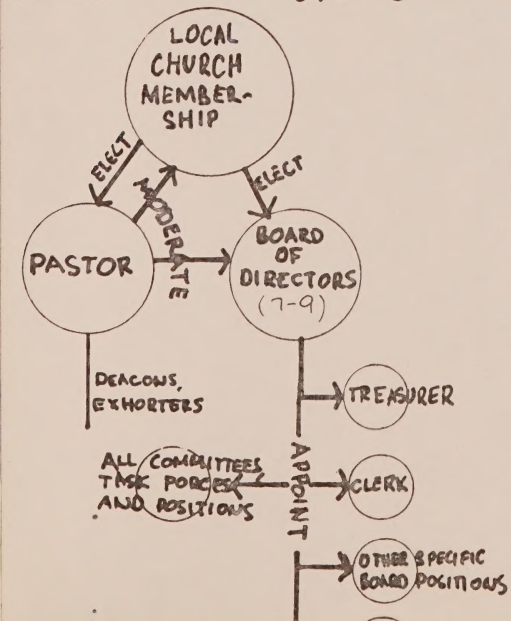
Stephen Rose. THE GRASS ROOTS CHURCH. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966.) Though a "60s oldie," it is still highly relevant. In fact, since the more recent ecclesiastical backlash, its urgent message is probably more to the point than more recent books. Rose does not repeat the common criticisms of church-as-usual; he offers a provocative proposal for restructuring.

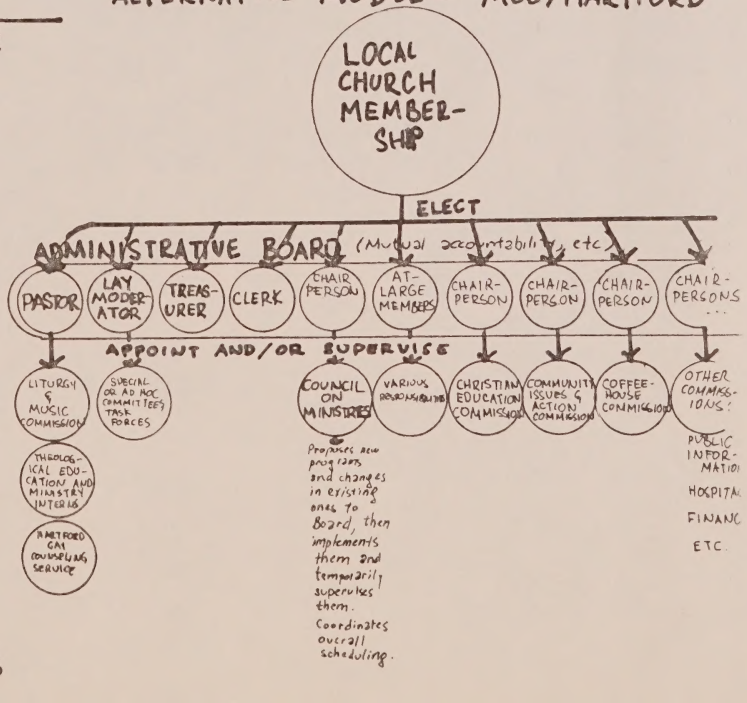
An attempted Organizational Diagram of the UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP of METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES



LOCAL CHARTERED CHURCH PER UFMCC's PRESENT BYLAWS



ALTERNATIVE MODEL — MCC/HARTFORD



Report on Commission on Government Structures and Systems (GSS)

Dallas, Texas, July 1982
Submitted by Steve Carson, District Lay Rep
To Lay Concerns Meeting, Northeast District, October 1982

Who is GSS?

GSS (Commission on Government Structures and Systems) is composed of one clergy rep (usually the District Coordinator) and a lay rep from each District, creating parity between clergy and laity. The Chair of GSS is Rev. Don Eastman of MCC Dallas.

Why GSS?

Our Fellowship by-laws are now over ten years old. In that time, UFMCC has experienced rapid growth. The present UFMCC with over 170 churches in and outside the U.S. is very different from the UFMCC of ten years ago. GSS is designed to provide a process to update the Fellowship by-laws in a comprehensive and representative manner.

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The current session of GSS has been mandated by the General Conference to revise Article V: Government, Organization and Officers. This article deals with the organization of the government of our church on Fellowship, District and local levels.

How it works

The task of GSS as mandated by the 1981 General Conference is to present a proposal for the revising of Article V to the 1983 General Conference in Toronto. To begin that work, the Commission met in Dallas in July 1982 to prepare a preliminary draft. From there, that draft will be presented to the Districts for reaction, feedback and input. This input will be brought back to the next meeting of GSS, scheduled for January 1983. A final draft will be prepared at that meeting and returned to the Districts that Spring for review. The proposal will then be voted on in Toronto.

This Report

The actual text of the preliminary draft accompanies this report. Please read it over carefully. Changes from the current by-laws are underlined. The handwritten comments in the margins are mine, not part of the official report. They simply point out changes or rationale in these revisions.

What follows is a summary of some of the important conceptual foundations of this draft. These include an effort to strengthen Districts, to give increasing responsibility to the most basic levels of the church rather than to become unnecessarily top-heavy. A rule of thumb was: if it doesn't need to be spelled out at a Fellowship level, don't.

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A. Proposal for the creation of "District Elders"

Under the current by-laws, there are seven Elders elected at-large by the General Conference. The functions of an Elder fall into the following areas: judicial (putting out fires, intervening in crises); administrative; episcopal/pastoral (appearing at installations and other church occasions); and program.

There are problems in the current set-up. The growing role of the episcopal/pastoral function has simply overburdened the Elders. We have the same number of Elders now with over 170 churches as when we had 70 churches. Most Elders live far away from their Liaison Districts, creating expensive travel costs and the problem of being far away from the people from the people to whom they are ministering.

There is also the question of non-representation of certain geographic areas, in that five of the seven Elders reside in California. The process of at-large voting creates a "tyranny of the majority" in which certain areas will most likely never have an Elder from their area. Also, the current set-up provides Districts with no direct voice in the Fellowship.

With this in mind, GSS is submitting a proposal that District Coordinators serve as Elders, elected by the District to a four year term. Three Elders would be elected at-large at General Conference to serve as Moderator, Clerk, and Treasurer.

Aspects of this proposal include:

- provides for geographic representation
- Districts have a direct voice in the Fellowship
- gives Elders local contact
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A. Districts and local churches are already paying for shipping Elders in from (usually) the West Coast. Travel costs will have to be carried by the Districts for Elders to attend meetings. However, the Elder will be much more available to visit local churches and attend District functions on a regular basis.

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A. GSS was double that number and worked well. Also, the work that needs to be done seems to merit an increased Board. There are currently too many hats for too few people.

Q. Won't these Elders be biased toward their own regional area?
A. Following this argument, the Elders are already biased toward one area (five of seven reside in California). This proposal provides for a much more representative Board of Elders, with much more contact and input from all parts of the Fellowship.

Q. Combining the duties of District Coordinator with those of Elder presents one person with a tremendous workload. Won't they have to be compensated to allow them to do this work without burning out?
A. This question is important and deserves a great deal of discussion. It will certainly require at least a half-time paid position. This will require re-assessing the current 2% tithe to the District. It will require from each District a certain level of organizational and financial maturity. We took a quick poll at our meeting to ascertain how District Coordinators are currently compensated by their Districts:

Compensation for District Coordinator (by Districts, under present arrangements)

Eastern Canada: travel
Northeast: travel, phone
Mid Atlantic: $125/month, plus travel and food
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South Atlantic: full-time salary ($1000/month plus travel)
Southeast: $175/month plus travel
Mid Central: travel and housing
South Central: $100/month plus travel (have savings account ready)
Southwest: $1000/month (incl. insurance) plus travel
Northwest: $900/month plus insurance plus $140/mo travel plus $40/mo clerical
Australia: formerly $100/week full-time
now $45/week part-time plus travel, phone, postage

Note: Recommended implementation procedure:

If this proposal is adopted by General Conference 1983, all Districts will conduct an election of District Officers at the immediately following District Conference.

Feedback from the current Elders: The current Board of Elders is enthusiastic about this proposal. They are extremely overburdened and welcome the help this would provide. Moderator Troy Perry supports the idea but would ask that the Vice-Moderator also be elected from the floor of General Conference. He also raised the question of the fairness of geographic representation over popular respresentation (eg. the West Coast, with 50% of the churches, would have two Elders; Canada, with far fewer churches, would also have two Elders).

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Much attention was given to the need to strengthen the responsibilities of the District. This emerged as a priority in surveys done before our meeting in Dallas and was incorporated into the framework of our deliberations at GSS.

Section C of Article V describes the role of the District Committee and of District Officers. Section A number 4 includes as a purpose of the District the "implementation of the By-laws and policies of the General Conference". Under the Discipline of Elders (Section B number 1 e) the draft states that charges against an Elder may be brought by a minimum of ten clergy or Lay Delegates (rather than Boards of Directors).

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Whenever possible, this proposed draft leans toward de-centralization: to more power and responsibility to Districts and to local churches. For example, in this draft it is a local option whether the Pastor serves as Moderator of the local Board of Directors. This allows an important opportunity for lay leadership. There is more flexibility as to the number of people on the Board of Directors, the proposal specifying only "at least four". Board members would serve two year terms; these terms would be staggered to provide continuity on the Board. (The reason behind changing the term from three years to two is that few of us could recall people who lasted that long. Two years seemed a more realistic commitment.) In certain cases, language has been updated to more accurately describe what is in fact occuring: for example, "parish coordinator" rather than "lay worship coordinator", and "pastoral search committee" rather than "pulpit committee".

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F. Article VI: Conditions and Procedures for Approval of Local Church Bodies

In our discussions at GSS, we realized how we tend to inflict visitors and new people with our various categories of churches: study group, mission, charter church. There is no need to confuse visitors with our own internal distinctions. At the same time, we need to provide some reasonable sequence for church starts and church development.

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Note: There was a great deal of discussion about new church starts. It is a serious matter, requiring responsibility both on the part of the new church and by the District. A new church requires direction and support. Expectations need to be clear: if little is expected, little happens. The District needs to provide realistic review of new church starts. It was pointed out that sentimentality must yield to intentionality.

G. Two unresolved issues

Tithing

There are proposals to re-assess the proportion of tithes to the Fellowship and to the District. The present by-laws require 10% to the Fellowship and at least 2% to the District. Many churches voluntary tithe 5% to the District. The increased responsibility assigned to the District in this draft would seem to merit increased financial support to the District. Proposals include mandating a 5% District tithe, or, re-evaluating the proportion that goes to the Fellowship (eg. 8% Fellowship, 7% District). There seems to be support for a total tithing of 15%. It is the breakdown of that 15% to Fellowship and to District that seems to be at issue. We took an informal poll as to how many churches are presently contributing 5% to the District:

Churches contributing 5% to the District

Northwest: all but one
Northeast: half
South Atlantic: most
Great Lakes: all
Eastern Canada: in process
Mid Atlantic: less than half
South Central: nearly all
Southeast: few
Southwest: undetermined

Have not considered: Australia
Mid Central
Western Canada

Voting by Study Groups at General Conference

This issue will come up as one of the first items of business at General Conference in Toronto. We did not discuss this at GSS, due to lack of time. Input from the Districts is needed on this issue.

H. Topics for Down the Road

Two topics surfaced at our meeting that were not addressed in any specific way, but may be considered in the years to come as our church grows, both in the States and abroad. The first is the creation of indigenous national churches. The second is the creation of regions in addition to districts. Regions would be larger areas of administration and program, and would probably meet on the off-years from General Conference. Districts would be smaller units and could meet two or three times during the year to provide opportunities for fellowship and support.

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G. Two unresolved issues

Tithing

There are proposals to re-assess the proportion of tithes to the Fellowship and to the District. The present by-laws require 10% to the Fellowship and at least 2% to the District. Many churches voluntary tithe 5% to the District. The increased responsibility assigned to the District in this draft would seem to merit increased financial support to the District. Proposals include mandating a 5% District tithe, or, re-evaluating the proportion that goes to the Fellowship (eg. 8% Fellowship, 7% District). There seems to be support for a total tithing of 15%. It is the breakdown of that 15% to Fellowship and to District that seems to be at issue. We took an informal poll as to how many churches are presently contributing 5% to the District:

Churches contributing 5% to the District

Northwest: all but one
Northeast: half
South Atlantic: most
Great Lakes: all
Eastern Canada: in process
Mid Atlantic: less than half
South Central: nearly all
Southeast: few
Southwest: undetermined

Have not considered: Australia
Mid Central
Western Canada

Voting by Study Groups at General Conference

This issue will come up as one of the first items of business at General Conference in Toronto. We did not discuss this at GSS, due to lack of time. Input from the Districts is needed on this issue.

H. Topics for Down the Road

Two topics surfaced at our meeting that were not addressed in any specific way, but may be considered in the years to come as our church grows, both in the States and abroad. The first is the creation of indigenous national churches. The second is the creation of regions in addition to districts. Regions would be larger areas of administration and program, and would probably meet on the off-years from General Conference. Districts would be smaller units and could meet two or three times during the year to provide opportunities for fellowship and support.

GOVERNMENT, STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS

QUESTIONAIRE

Consider the following:

Question One: What is there about our present structuring of MCC that is most valuable and should be retained?

Question Two: What are the MAJOR areas of concern in our church government which the Commission should address?

Question Three: Is there need and justification for standardizing the following:

A. Worship styles?
B. Clergy Attire?
C. Local By-Laws and Procedures?
D. By-Laws and Procedures at the District level?

Question Four: To what extent and what areas should ministerial involvement and authority be A)Increased? B)Decreased?*(Consider local Boards, worship service, UFMCC Commissions and Committees, etc)*

Question Five: To what extent and in what areas should lay persons' involvement and authority be A)Increased? B)Decreased? *(Consider the above as well as positions such as Elder, District Co-ordinator, etc.)*

Question Six: What should be criteria for lay ministry? How should we utilize our lay ministers? Should we open up new areas of lay ministry?

Question Seven: What do you see as the most immediate, critical problem areas to which the Commission should address itself?

AL SMITHSON

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May 5, 1978

Rev. Robert S. Wolfe
Canadian Ministerial Rep to G.S.& S.
P. O. Box 5178
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 4B2

Dear Rev. Wolfe:

Thank you for your inquiry and I am pleased to enclose information as to the activities of the Commission in the Southwest District. We have conducted a workshop at the last District Conference in which a number of positive steps were taken by the District to support the work of the Commission and to implement programs for eliciting input and participation by all of the congregations.

The Commission faces a number of challenging areas in which important and difficult decisions must be made. One of these is the point you bring up in your letter and that is the question of the relationship of churches outside the U.S. to the American churches.

Thus far, the Commission has received no input on this important question and I would ask you and your lay representative to elicit input on this subject for the Commission. It is clear that this subject is of important interest to our churches and would undoubtedly generate much interest and input for the Commission.

I would be eager to receive a report on this from you and will be happy to disseminate it to the other members of the Commission. I will be looking forward to receiving the name of your lay rep to the Commission.

Thanking you again for your interest in the vital work of the Commission, I remain

Very truly yours,

A. Smithson

AL SMITHSON

AS:ps
Enclosures
cc: Board of Elders
Members of the Commission

Brs

272-8482

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